



# Senator Harry Reid

## A Report to Seniors in Nevada

Summer 2003

Dear Friend,

*Every day, more and more retired Americans are making Nevada their home. Working to ensure that every Nevadan enjoys a healthy and secure retirement is one of my highest priorities in the United States Senate.*

*Fighting for affordable health care, including a high quality Medicare drug benefit, protecting Social Security and pensions, and making sure our veterans are treated fairly are just some of the ways I am working for retired Nevadans.*

*As we approach new challenges in the future, I look forward to working with you to build a healthy, independent and prosperous future.*



On February 13, 2003, I supported the Do-Not-Call Implementation Act, which will help Nevadans put an end to dreaded dinner-time telemarketing calls. If you register with the National Do Not Call Registry, you will substantially limit the number of telemarketing calls you receive. On October 1, 2003, when the National Do Not Call Registry will go into effect, most telemarketers will be required to remove numbers on the registry from their call lists or may be subject to a fine of up to \$11,000.

**Call: 1-888-382-1222**  
[www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov)

## A Prescription Drug Benefit in Medicare

**F**ew things weigh more heavily on the minds of Nevadans than the soaring cost of prescription drugs. That's why creating a comprehensive, meaningful and voluntary drug benefit for our senior citizens has been one of my top priorities.

On June 26, 2003, the Senate passed the Prescription Drug and Medicare Improvement Act of 2003. This bill is one small step toward my ultimate goal of providing a voluntary and comprehensive drug benefit for all Medicare beneficiaries. Under this plan, all Medicare beneficiaries would receive an equal benefit, regardless of whether they enroll in a private plan or remain in traditional Medicare. This bill would also provide important protections for low-income seniors.

The House of Representatives also recently passed a Medicare prescription drug bill, but this bill would radically restructure the Medicare program. I have serious concerns about the House approach because it would push seniors to join HMOs and make it more expensive for those who wish to stay in the traditional Medicare program.

A conference committee is working to reconcile the differences between the two bills. On July 8th, I wrote a letter to President Bush outlining my conditions of support for a final Medicare prescription drug bill. The final legislation must not privatize Medicare, force seniors to give up their doctor or pay higher premiums to stay in their current Medicare program, or cause employer plans to drop coverage for their retirees. Some Medicare beneficiaries already receive drug coverage through their former employers, and Congress should not pass legislation that would jeopardize this coverage.

I believe we must reject extreme proposals and enact a final Medicare bill that begins to provide a meaningful prescription drug benefit. Prescription drugs can help us live healthy, productive and pain-free lives. Seniors should be able to enjoy their retirement years without worrying about how they'll pay for the medications they need.

## Prescription Drug Information

### Senior Rx

[www.nevadaseniorrx.com](http://www.nevadaseniorrx.com)  
1-800-262-7726

### Medicare Website – Prescription Drug Assistance Programs

[www.medicare.gov/Prescription/Home.asp](http://www.medicare.gov/Prescription/Home.asp)

### Volunteers in Health Care (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation)

[www.rxassist.org](http://www.rxassist.org)

## Bob Hope 1903 - 2003

Bob Hope was a star of radio, movies and television - but his star shone brightest when he was entertaining American troops. From World War II to Desert Storm, his humor brought a little touch of home to soldiers who needed it most. He performed for more than 11 million men and women in uniform. He'll be sorely missed, but our nation will always be thankful for the memories.

– Senator Reid on the Passing of Bob Hope (7/28/03)

## Protecting Social Security

Considering that one out of every five seniors relies on Social Security for 100 percent of their income, it's easy to understand why we must do everything we can to preserve and protect this program.

Social Security is not in immediate danger. In fact, the Social Security Trust Fund is projected to last until the year 2042. After that date, if we do nothing, beneficiaries will still receive more than 73 percent of their benefits. We must still make some changes to the system to meet the needs of the retiring Baby Boom generation, but we have time to make changes.

Privatizing Social Security, however, could seriously jeopardize the long-term fiscal health of the program. Social Security was designed to be an insurance plan, not an investment program. Instead of guaranteed benefits based on an individual's work history, benefits under a privatized system would depend on an individual's investment skills – and on sheer luck. Reductions in core benefits would also inhibit Social Security's ability to combat poverty among the elderly and disabled.

Social Security is the most successful social program in the world and is much more than just another financial investment. I am committed to ensuring that it remains a stable and secure insurance policy for all Nevadans.

### Social Security Fairness

Public service retirees' Social Security benefits should not be reduced because they are also receiving government pensions. The government pension offset and the windfall elimination provisions in current law prohibit government pensioners, or the widows of government pensioners, from collecting the full Social Security benefits they have earned. I am a cosponsor of the Social Security Fairness Act (S. 349) which would remove these unfair restrictions.

### Social Security Notch

Congress has an obligation to those born during the Social Security notch period who, through no fault of their own, receive less than those who were fortunate enough to be born just days before or after the notch period. This year I re-introduced the Notch Fairness Act of 2003 (S. 1418) which would provide a lump sum payment or a revised benefit computation for Social Security notch recipients.

## Securing Our Nation from Danger

Nevada has long been at the forefront in defending our nation. When September 11 turned our attention from adversaries abroad to threats within our own borders, I fought to make Nevadans and the nation more secure.

After September 11, I hosted a bipartisan counter-terrorism summit that focused on our nation's front line defenders: our firefighters, police, medical personnel and other first responders. At my invitation, the Secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, visited the National Center for Combating Terrorism that I established at the Nevada Test Site to more extensively train the nation's first responders and other counter-terrorism personnel.

Since then, I have secured over \$100 million for the Center to give nearly 10,000 first responders the best emergency response training available, and I have secured over \$1 million directly for Nevada hospitals to prepare for a possible bioterrorism attack.

I have also fought to make Nevada's airports more secure. Earlier this year, the Transportation Security Administration proposed to eliminate 150 security screeners from McCarran International Airport. Cutting these important personnel at the nation's second busiest airport would have weakened the confidence of air travelers and hurt Nevada's tourism industry.

In May I met with Admiral Loy, the head of Transportation Security Administration, and the proposal to cut our screeners was abandoned. I also changed the law to require the Administration to allocate more of its \$500 million security fund to airports like McCarran that accommodate a high volume of travelers every day.



*Senator Harry Reid with Secretary Tom Ridge and General John Gordon, Homeland Security Advisor at the National Center for Combating Terrorism, Nevada Test Site.*



## Fair Retirement Benefits for All Disabled Veterans

Over the last several years, I have fought to correct a long-standing injustice affecting our nation's veterans. Most veterans who retire with 20 years of honorable service, and who also have a service-related disability, are not permitted to collect both their retirement pay and disability benefits concurrently. This prohibition on "concurrent receipt" has plagued our veterans for too long.

A retired disabled veteran must deduct from his retirement pay, dollar for dollar, the amount of any disability compensation received. In many cases, the effect is to totally wipe out the veteran's retirement pay. The end result is that the disabled military retiree loses all of the value of his 20 or more years of service to our nation and also pays the costs associated with living with his disability. We do not subject any other federal retiree to this kind of offset, only our disabled military retirees.



The disabled military retirees that I hear from in Nevada and across the country feel betrayed by this system and this very outdated and unjust law. Retirees feel cheated because they lose the vested value of their years of service when the government shortchanges their retirement checks every month; in many cases, the severely disabled do not even receive one penny of their retirement pay.

This is simply a matter of fundamental fairness. There is no reason to deny a veteran who has served his country honorably for 20 years the right to the full value of his retirement pay simply because his service also caused him to become disabled. But that is what this terribly unfair law does.

With the Fiscal Year 2000 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress recognized the unfairness in current law and established the Severely Disabled Compensation Program, which provides a modest payment to severely disabled military retirees. In last year's National Defense Authorization Act, I led the way in establishing the Combat-Related Special Compensation program. Purple Heart recipients, and other retirees who are rated at least 60 percent disabled because of armed conflict, hazardous duty, training exercises, or mishaps involving military equipment can now receive special compensation. But these programs are stop-gap measures, made necessary only because the unfair prohibition on concurrent receipt is still law. It is time to finally end the prohibition and lift this unfair burden from the backs of our disabled veterans.

Again this year, I introduced an amendment to the 2004 National Defense Authorization bill to end the restriction on concurrent receipt. The amendment passed the Senate unanimously; however, the White House has threatened to veto the underlying bill if my provision is included in the final version worked out by House and Senate negotiators. Hopefully, with your help, we can overcome this opposition and give our disabled veterans the fair treatment and compensation they deserve.

## Reducing Your Tax Burden

I have long been an advocate for significant tax reform. My first speech in the United States Senate focused on the need to provide greater rights to taxpayers. Since then, I have helped pass significant legislation to make the tax system more equitable and accountable to American taxpayers.

You should not be forced to pay taxes to a state in which you no longer live or vote. That is taxation without representation. In 1997, after a long fight, I passed legislation that eliminated this so-called "source tax" by banning states from taxing the pensions of former residents.

I also worked hard to pass the Taxpayers' Bill of Rights, which guaranteed taxpayers the right to have an attorney represent them before the IRS, required the IRS to clearly explain taxpayers' rights to them, prohibited the IRS from using quotas for audits or property seizures and allowed taxpayers to recover financial damages caused by the IRS.

I later cosponsored Taxpayer Bill of Rights II, which increased the amount a taxpayer could recover from the IRS in civil damages and prohibited retroactive tax regulations. Finally, I helped pass the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act. This comprehensive bipartisan legislation revamped the IRS to make it more accountable to taxpayers.

I will continue to fight for the rights of all Nevada taxpayers.

## Battling the Proposed Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Dump

**L**ed by the Bush Administration's Department of Energy, the proposed Yucca Mountain Project would force Nevadans to store 77,000 tons of the nation's nuclear waste at a site about one hour from the burgeoning population of Las Vegas. I am committed to protecting the health and safety of Nevadans, and I will continue to strongly oppose efforts to construct or open a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain.

The Administration's ill-conceived Yucca plan does not adequately account for the dangers posed by a leak in the repository, an earthquake, or a volcanic eruption which could endanger people and the environment by releasing radioactive waste into the air or groundwater. Transporting the waste across Nevada would also put Nevadans at risk.

The Yucca Mountain Project is also a waste of taxpayer money. The estimated \$100 billion price tag for Yucca are funds that would be much better invested in preserving Social Security, protecting our nation, and educating our children. As a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I continue to slash Yucca's budget and redirect those funds to programs that help Nevadans build a better future.

I am also committed to exposing the serious problems with the project itself. Recently Senator Ensign and I held a Congressional hearing to learn about problems with the project. We learned that many employees who found serious problems with Yucca have been silenced, transferred, or removed from their positions. Such behavior by the Department of Energy toward its own employees is completely unacceptable. Senator Ensign and I have sent a letter to Attorney General John Ashcroft demanding that he investigate these allegations of intimidation. We also introduced legislation to extend whistleblower protections to employees of the Department of Energy, including the Yucca Mountain project.



## Putting Nevada Seniors First

**C**ongress continues to make critical decisions that will affect all Nevada's seniors. You have the power to influence this debate. I will keep working hard to put Nevada seniors first, and I hope you will stay involved in your community. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about issues facing senior citizens, Nevadans and all Americans.

### Online:

Please visit my website at <http://reid.senate.gov> and sign up to receive regular e-mail updates.

### Write or Call:

#### Washington, D.C.

528 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
202-224-3542

#### Las Vegas

333 Las Vegas Blvd. South  
Suite #8016  
Las Vegas, NV 89101  
702-388-5020

#### Reno

400 S. Virginia Street  
Suite #902  
Reno, NV 89501  
775-686-5750

#### Carson City

600 East Williams Street  
Suite #302  
Carson City, NV 89701  
775-882-7343

UNITED STATES SENATE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4103

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